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ABSTRACT

Information is presented to help individuals and groups translate their concerns about youth into concrete, constructive action in the community. At the heart of the guide is a step-by-step process for action. The first section deals with taking individual action, exploring ways that the individual can make a difference. The second part of the guide provides practical suggestions for gatherings of people, in groups of 2 or 200, to interpret information, share a vision, and commit to action. Change takes time, and it is necessary to realize that it will probably be 3 or 4 years before a program shows results. One of the most important decisions a group can make is to plan for early successes so that participants can demonstrate the value of working together. An annotated list of 10 resources to help in addressing youth problems is included, and this list is supplemented by an additional list of 7 resources without annotation. Sixteen worksheets are presented to help in issues clarification and planning. (SLD)

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WORKING TOGETHER FOR YOUTH

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A Practical Guide for Individuals and Groups

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A Practical Guide for Individuals and Groups

RESPECTEEN Helping Parents and Teens Respect Each Other – and Themselves

NOTE:

Working Together for Youth was prepared by Search Institute for RespecTeen, a national program of Lutheran Brotherhood that provides resources to parents, communities, schools, youth-serving organizations, and congregations to promote positive youth development across the country. Lutheran Brotherhood is a fraternal benefit society based in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Search Institute is a non-profit organization that specializes in practical research benefiting children and youth. For more information on RespecTeen, call, toll-free, 1-800-888-3820.

Working Together for Youth

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Introduction

THE SCHOOL NURSE and the county social worker were meeting about the seventh teenage girl in the junior high to be pregnant this year. They felt alone and helpless—not because they didn't have help to offer, but because they couldn't get anyone else to believe there was a problem. Each time they met to discuss how to help the young people and families involved, they shared their frustration and their desire to do something to help young people make healthier choices.

The two concerned citizens decided to start talking to a few other people: a school counselor, a health teacher, a local pediatrician. They discovered everyone was concerned about the problem. Furthermore, they all recognized that one reason for the problem was that junior high students had practically no sexuality education available through schools or faith communities.

The school nurse brought the information to a citizens group to which she belonged. Another member, who was also on the school board, started looking into available sexuality education curricula. A local pastor checked what churches were doing. Within a few months, the school board approved a survey of youth, and the citizens group helped spread the results to almost every organization in town through forums, articles, and other presentations. Eventually, a sexuality education program was integrated into the school curriculum.

Thus, initial conversations between two concerned citizens grew, over time, into a community-wide awareness program and action projects to provide for positive youth development in their town. Parents, schools, religious congregations, parks, and agencies all worked together for youth.

That community would never have moved to concerted efforts if those two concerned citizens hadn't had a deep, persistent concern about young people. But because they acted on their concerns—first in little ways—that nurse and social worker became catalysts for significant, positive change.

Coming to the point where you can't tolerate a serious situation any longer is the first step in doing something to make a difference—to make your community a little bit better place for young people. *Working Together for Youth* is written for people who are wondering what to do next, how to move from concern—or even frustration—into constructive action that makes a positive difference in the community.

This guidebook helps you translate individual and group concerns about youth into concrete, constructive action in your community.

Identifying *Your* Priorities

At the heart of this guide is a step-by-step process for translating concern into action. It doesn't tell you three or six or ten programs to launch in your community to deal with all the issues among youth. After all, each community is different, with different concerns, different priorities, different resources. Rather, it provides a framework for identifying your concerns, your resources, your priorities. Then it gives a framework for addressing basic questions such as:

- What is happening—both good and bad—with young people in your community?
- How do you know where to start, even with small actions?
- How might you keep from being so overwhelmed by the immensity of the problems you see that you can't start?
- How do you work with other concerned people in your community?

Based on the experience of thousands of individuals, and hundreds of communities, *Working Together for Youth* explains an ongoing individual or community-wide change process that is hopeful and productive. The process involves three critical tasks that you can use over and over again in different settings:

- gathering *information* about problems and strengths of young people in your community
- building a *shared vision* of the future you desire for youth
- taking *action* to help you achieve your vision for youth

The processes involve, also, a great deal of *reflection*—stepping back and, in a disciplined way, looking at the outcomes of your actions, new information you receive, and changes you might need to make in your actions as you go through the process.

About This Guide

This guide is set up so that you can have an internal conversation with yourself as you read it. Later, if you wish, you can use that same conversational process with other people. The conversations always involve the three critical tasks: information, vision, and action.

The guide is divided into two parts:

1. **Taking Individual Action**—Part One focuses on how you as an individual can identify and take action based on your own concerns about youth in your community. We are serious when we say that you as an individual can have a positive impact. We believe that small, individual actions matter, that small victories are significant. Every word of personal concern, every hopeful picture of the future expressed by even one person contributes to a better world for young people.

2. **Widening the Circle**—In the event that you decide to go farther than individual action, Part Two gives you practical suggestions for gatherings of all sorts of people—in groups of two or 20 or 200—to interpret information, share a vision, and commit to action. At several points we provide agenda suggestions for effective, productive time with others. These ideas can work in getting such groups started, or they can be used to enhance the effectiveness of existing task forces, coalitions, or other community efforts.

Because writing thoughts on paper helps some people organize their thinking, you will find worksheets for your jottings throughout the book. You may want to copy them first so you have a clean master for other uses. They are useful in lots of different settings, and the guide suggests when and how you might try them.

It Adds Up

Sometimes it's easy to be overwhelmed, feeling like there's nothing you can do to address concerns or make a difference. Problems can seem too daunting and complex to understand fully. Needs can seem too great to be met with the resources at hand. Your energy may not always seem adequate to sustain you when you feel like you're working all alone.

An ancient proverb says, "Drops that gather one by one finally become a sea." It is our hope that you and others like you will find in this guide new insights and new strategies for creating a wave of concern that makes your community a better place for youth.

1. Explore Your Motivations

WHY ARE YOU reading this book? What has brought you to this point of wanting to help youth? These may seem like odd questions, but they're important. Your own motivations will make a great deal of difference in the way you look at youth and their concerns. And understanding your own motivations can be an important factor in helping you identify key concerns and making a difference in those areas.

Perhaps you are inspired by what you see among young people. A 13-year old volunteer cheering your mother in a nursing home. Local Boy Scouts helping a blind teenager on a camping trip. A high school athlete who is a peer counselor to an Asian refugee new to your community. Maybe you want to help more young people have the satisfaction of being responsible for improving society.

Or is something disturbing you terribly? The senseless death of young people who rolled a speeding pickup. A growing number of youth in your community who are involved in premature sexual activity or who are abusing alcohol or other drugs. Your own worries as a parent that your child is being exposed to too many risky and dangerous influences. Diminishing resources in your organization or community for children and youth. The lack of common values in your community that could guide your young people into life-enhancing behaviors. Do you feel you must do something to prevent more tragedy or to help young people in trouble?

Maybe you're part of an ongoing community organization, agency, or task force that addresses youth issues. Perhaps the organization is having trouble finding a focus or moving forward with constructive action. Possibly you're struggling to find a way to help the organization move forward and make a significant contribution to youth.

Before directly addressing the contemporary concerns of youth, it's important to reflect on your motivations. Why? These motivations are key to understanding and sustaining your involvement. This knowledge can also help to overcome some of the pitfalls that occur when people have hidden or unrealized agendas that undercut their efforts.

Your own background and experiences shape the way you approach youth today.

Looking into Your Past

The person you are today and the values that motivate you are shaped significantly by your past. Your personal history can be a rich resource for sustaining you in your efforts. Or it can be a roadblock to effective action. Most likely, it's a mixture of the two. Understanding these motivations is the first step toward acting constructively.

When I think about my own growing-up years, I remember living in a protected, rural town of 25,000 where a curfew sounded every weeknight at 9:00 p.m., our signal that everyone under 16 had to be off the streets. Hardly a store stayed open after 6:00 p.m.—except during the holiday season. During the day, however, we were free to walk, bike, or ride all over town. My family placed no restrictions on where we could go or to whom we could talk. We saw no need for them.

Those experiences colored my views when my children were growing up in a suburb. I worried that my children couldn't have the carefree run of the community that I had enjoyed. We had a rule, for example, that our children couldn't visit a shopping center one block from our house after dark. Young people hung out there, and my husband, a school administrator, knew the police regularly picked up youth there for drugs and other trouble.

Today my own experiences as a young person and a parent affect my concerns about our grandchildren, who live just one mile from us. They are taught not to talk to strangers, and they must learn self-protection skills that I'd not even heard of until I was a young adult. Whenever I think about their world, I'm always reminded of the differences with mine.

Think back a few years (maybe it's a lot of years) to when you were growing up. Bring into your mind a picture of the community in which you grew up. It's likely that those experiences—the good with the bad—had an impact on what you are doing at this moment. At the very least, those experiences help shape your vision and expectations about what life can or should be like for young people.

To prompt your memories, jot down a few notes on Worksheet 1. Think about difficult times and good times. Think about some of the best things that happened to you. What two or three things helped you develop in positive ways? Who invested something in you? Your family? Friends your age? Other adults? People in school? People in church?

When You Were Growing Up

1. Think about your community as you were growing up. Was it a town, the country, a big city, a school district, a neighborhood, a group of people who shared common goals and values, friendships, a religious congregation—or several of these?

My "community" when I was a youth was:

2. Was your community a healthy place or an unhealthy place for young people to grow up? What was healthy about it? What was unhealthy about it?

3. What two or three things went on in your life that helped you?

4. Who invested something in you? Your family? Other adults? Friends your age? Someone in school? In church?

5. Think of the teenage year that was the hardest year for you. Were you 14? Were you 17? What were the two or three most difficult issues you faced that year?

6. Who helped you through those problems? Anyone? Adults? Friends your age? Or were you pretty much left on your own?

7. How do you think these experiences might shape your concerns about youth today?

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What You Have to Offer Youth

As you recall those people who made a difference in your own life, reflect again on today's young people and your community. What lives do you already touch? Where do you have an impact? Is it primarily in your own family? or a youth organization in town? or a religious group?

As you'll discover throughout this guide, you don't have to be a major community leader to have an impact on young people. Each person has gifts to offer youth, whether it be in one-to-one relationships, coaching, behind-the-scenes organizing, or teaching. Use Worksheet 2 to help guide your reflections.

With this understanding of yourself as a resource to youth in your community, it's time to think about the challenges and opportunities that face youth in your community.

What Do You Have to Offer Youth?

1. Think of your family or household. What are all the connections your household has with young people?

2. What are your own connections with young people? Are they primarily through organizations? through personal friendships? other connections? through what you read in newspapers or magazines? through your daily work?

3. If the young persons you know best were to tell their friends about you, what do you think they would say you have to offer young people in your community?

4. Where do you think your strengths are in relating to youth? Through one-to-one relationships? working with groups? being a friend and encourager? working behind the scenes on their behalf? helping other adults so they can be more effective in relating to youth? working in public life to influence your community on behalf of youth?

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2. Start with Solid Information

MOST OF US would agree that we want young people to be healthy and responsible. We want them to make positive choices and avoid risky situations. But sometimes it's hard to sort out all the things we want for young people. All the factors, issues, and concerns can seem disjointed and overwhelming. How can we start to understand the issues and dynamics in a systematic way?

Having an overall picture of issues among youth is crucial before you can recommend approaches for creating a healthier community and addressing youth-related issues. National or state statistics or trends can be a good starting point, but they are not adequate in themselves, since every community is different. General information should be supplemented with specific information about your own town or city.

Solid information can come from many sources, including:

- **Surveys of youth in your community**—Many communities gather information on their young people using in-depth surveys such as *Search Institute Profiles of Student Life*, which are offered to communities as a service of the RespecTeen program. (See resource listing for information on this service.) Other surveys sponsored by schools or community groups can provide similar useful information. If you have access to this type of information, you have an invaluable resource for understanding youth in your community.
- **Local government or school statistics**—Schools and government offices generally gather and have available basic information on young people, including basic demographics, family incomes, trends, achievements, and other issues. A call to the high school or to city hall can be the source of this valuable information.
- **Conversations, focus groups, or interviews with youth and parents in the community**—Whether gathered formally or informally, insights from parents and youth can be a valuable source of knowledge about community dynamics.
- **Media reports on youth in the community**—Keep a clipping file of stories about youth in your community. Over time, you'll develop a collection that highlights many concerns in your community.

When addressing youth issues, it's vital to understand the world of youth in your community. This chapter provides a framework for organizing information about youth.

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- **Interviews or discussions with youth work practitioners and other experts**—Teachers, youth workers, counselors, clergy, law enforcement officers, and others have valuable perspectives on youth issues in your community. These people are your neighbors and colleagues, so it would be natural to ask them about their concerns.

One of your most important tasks at this point is to put your hunches and information together in such a way that you can focus on what you believe are the most important issues your youth and community face. As you expand your information base, your sense of the issues may change. However, it is helpful to stop along the way to reflect on what you understand so far.

A Framework for Understanding Youth

Gathering basic information need not be a complicated process. Because you're already concerned about youth, you've probably been doing this research already—even if you don't call it research. You've heard other people's perspectives during meetings and conversations. You've naturally noticed articles that talk about youth, and you generally turn up the volume when a story on teens appears on the evening news.

Now the challenge is to pull all this formal or informal research together so that it is manageable and makes sense. Under the sponsorship of the RespecTeen program, Search Institute has developed a framework for understanding youth, which was first presented in *The Troubled Journey: A Portrait of 6th-12th Grade Youth.* A follow-up study titled *Healthy Communities, Healthy Youth* examined specific community strengths that help youth grow up healthy.*

Many communities, schools, and organizations have found these frameworks to be helpful. Instead of focusing only on individual problem behaviors, they look at numerous factors in young people's lives, both positive and negative, that influence development. This fresh approach can help to shed new light on youth issues in your community. This perspective is adapted here as one useful model for capturing the range of issues and concerns of youth.

Six basic themes can help in framing our understanding of youth:

1. **Assets**—Assets are factors in a young person's life that help young people grow up healthy. They involve an interlocking system of support, control, and structure (called "external assets") that give young people webs of safety and love important for stimulating and nurturing healthy development. They also include a range of "internal assets," a set of commitments, values, and competencies that help a person thrive and make positive, healthy choices. (See Worksheet 3.)

2. **Deficits**—Deficits can be thought of as the opposite of assets. They are negative influences in a young person's life that make it more difficult to grow up healthy, because they either block the development of assets, or they ease the way into risky behaviors. Deficits don't inevitably do permanent harm, but each makes harm more possible. (See Worksheet 4.)

** Summaries of both reports are available free of charge from RespecTeen by calling 1-800-888-3820. Full reports are available from Search Institute. Call 1-800-888-7828 for information.*

3. **Prosocial involvement**—Prosocial behavior covers a wide range of actions that show a concern for helping others. It involves face-to-face helping of people in distress, acts of personal kindness, voluntary service in organizations, and efforts to overcome injustices in society. Young people who are involved in prosocial activities are less likely to be involved in at-risk behaviors. (See Worksheet 5.)

4. **At-risk behaviors**—When young people have few assets and many deficits, they are more likely to engage in at-risk behaviors. At-risk behaviors involve choices that can limit their emotional, physical, or economic well-being during adolescence and adulthood. At-risk behaviors can be grouped into seven different areas: tobacco use, alcohol use, illicit drug use, sexual activity, depression and attempted suicide, antisocial behavior, and school problems. (See Worksheet 6.)

5. **Community strengths**—A follow-up study to *The Troubled Journey* looked at overall communities to determine what factors within community life have the greatest impact on young people's healthy development. This perspective highlights the impact of various institutions and groups within a community. (See Worksheet 7.)

6. **Crisis intervention services**—Though you may work consistently to build a foundation for youth so that problems are less likely, sometimes they will occur. Young people will still become trapped in crises, poor choices, and difficult situations. A broad view of supporting youth includes providing services for those who might otherwise fall through the cracks. The good news is that these services are not used as frequently if the other factors are also addressed in the community. (See Worksheet 8.)

Seeing the bigger picture of the interplay of these issues gives a more complete idea of what you might desire for the young people of your community, and what you might want to help them avoid. The framework brings together a wide range of information about youth into a manageable structure. It also helps you identify gaps in the information you have—helping you identify areas where you need to ask more questions and get more information. (Worksheet 9 helps you draw together the major issues from the preceding worksheets.)

As you think through these issues, remember that building a healthy community for youth doesn't mean doing harm to others in the community. In fact, building a healthy community for youth could also benefit others, such as the elderly or young children.

The worksheets on the following pages are designed to help you think intentionally about the strengths and concerns of your community and its young people. You may copy all of these pages for use with others concerned about youth.

Assets of Youth in Your Community

Here is a framework for understanding assets that are important ingredients for growing up healthy. For more specific definitions of each asset (as well as national statistics for each asset), see *The Troubled Journey.** What do you know about—and what are your guesses about—the assets of youth in your community? Jot your knowledge, impressions, or hunches in the third column. If you have information from *Profiles of Student Life* or another survey, include it as well. Fill in what you know now; then decide later if you need to do additional research on the issues.

Category	Description	Youth in My Community
Support	Feeling supported by those around and having people to turn to for advice and care.	
Control	Having parent(s) who monitor and discipline; spending school nights at home; and having friends who model responsible behavior.	
Structured time	Spending time in constructive, structured activities such as music, extra-curricular activities, community-based activities, and religious organizations.	
Educational commitment	Doing well in school, being motivated, and aspiring to continuing education beyond high school.	
Positive values	Valuing helping others, being concerned about hunger, caring about others, and valuing sexual restraint.	
Social competence	Having social skills such as assertiveness, decision-making, friendship-making, and planning, as well as self-esteem and a positive view of the future.	

Based on what you know now. . .

1. What are the three strongest assets among youth in your community?

2. What three assets are young people most lacking?

3. What don't you know about their assets?

4. Where could you find out more?

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Deficits that Inhibit Positive Development

The Troubled Journey identified 10 influences that can interfere with healthy development of youth. They involve victimization experiences, negative social influences, and other pressures. For more specific definitions of each deficit (as well as national statistics for each deficit), see *The Troubled Journey.** What do you know about—and what are your guesses about—the deficits of youth in your community? Jot your knowledge, impressions, or hunches in the third column. If you have information from *Profiles of Student Life* or another survey, include it as well. Fill in what you know now; then decide later if you need to do additional research on the issues.

Category	Description	Youth in My Community
Negative social influences	Being exposed a great deal to negative social influences such as negative peer pressure, drinking parties, excessive television, and parental addiction.	
Social isolation	Feeling socially isolated and spending a lot of time alone at home.	
Victimization	Experiencing either physical or sexual abuse.	
Other pressures	Having overly hedonistic values and feeling under regular stress.	

Based on what you know now. . .

1. With which of the deficits are youth in your community most likely to struggle?

2. What deficits appear to be less problematic and widespread?

3. What don't you know about young people's deficits?

4. Where could you find out more?

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Prosocial Involvement

Young people who are involved in service and other prosocial activities are less likely to be involved in at-risk behaviors. Furthermore, they are more likely to contribute to their community. For more specific information about prosocial involvement (as well as national statistics about involvement), see *The Troubled Journey.** What do you know about—and what are your guesses about—your young people's involvement in service to others? Jot your knowledge, impressions, or hunches in the third column. If you have information from *Profiles of Student Life* or another survey, include it as well. Fill in what you know now; then decide later if you need to do additional research on the issues.

CATEGORY	DESCRIPTION	YOUTH IN MY COMMUNITY
Volunteering time to help others	Regularly spending time helping others in crisis or volunteering in organizations for service and justice.	

Based on what you know now. . .

1. What are areas of strength in your community regarding youth service?

2. Where are the gaps in youth service involvement?

3. What don't you know about your young people's service involvement?

4. Where could you find out?

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At-Risk Behaviors of Youth

At-risk behaviors involve choices that can limit young people's emotional, physical, or economic well-being during adolescence and adulthood. As this worksheet shows, they can be grouped into nine categories, based on *The Troubled Journey.** What do you know about the incidence of at-risk behaviors among youth in your community? Jot your knowledge, impressions, or hunches in the third column. If you have information from *Profiles of Student Life* or another survey, include it as well. Fill in what you know now; then decide later if you need to do additional research on the issues.

Category	Description	Youth in My Community
Alcohol use	Frequently using alcohol or being involved in binge drinking.	
Tobacco use	Frequently using cigarettes or chewing tobacco.	
Illicit drug use	Frequently using illicit drugs.	
Sexual activity	Being sexually active, and, if sexually active, not using contraceptives.	
Depression/ suicide	Being sad or depressed most of the time, or attempting suicide.	
Anti-social behavior	Being involved in vandalism, group fighting, police trouble, theft, or weapon use.	
School problems	Frequently skipping school or wanting to drop out before completing high school.	
Vehicle safety	Drinking and driving, riding with a drunk driver, or not wearing a seatbelt.	
Other	Having an eating disorder.	

Based on what you know now . . .

1. Are many young people involved in some of these behaviors? How many? In which ones?

2. Which of the at-risk behaviors among your youth are you personally most concerned about?

3. What are your information sources? Do you need better/additional information? Where could you get it?

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Strengths Your Community Offers Youth

A Search Institute study found that four characteristics most distinguish healthy communities from less healthy communities. The key factors are listed below. For more specific description of these community strengths, see *Healthy Communities, Healthy Youth.** What do you know about—and what are your guesses about—strengths that your community offers youth? Jot your knowledge, impressions, or hunches in the third column. Fill in what you know now; then decide later if you need additional research on the issues.

CATEGORY	DESCRIPTION	MY COMMUNITY
Community involvement	Most youth are involved in structured activities through school, community organizations, sports, or religious institutions. They also report positive relationships with non-parent adults.	
Family	Youth experience caring and supportive relations with their parents. Their parents monitor their activities, express concern or disagreement with negative behaviors, and discipline.	
School	Youth experience a caring and supportive school environment, and a high proportion of their peers try and care about doing well in school. Furthermore, families are involved in the education of their children.	
Peer environment	Youth have peers who are involved in prosocial activities and avoid overly self-centered values. On the other hand, the community has low levels of youth who skip school or attend drinking parties.	

Based on what you now know . . .

1. In what areas is your community strongest as a whole? Weakest?

2. What don't you know about community strengths? Where could you learn it?

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Crisis Intervention Services

A broad view of supporting youth includes providing services for those who might otherwise fall through the cracks. These services might include programs for youth in poverty, remedial education programs, alcohol and other drug intervention programs, crisis pregnancy services, victimization centers, etc.

1. What types of intervention services in your community are most effective?

2. What crises that youth face are not being addressed with current services?

3. Who are the key players in providing these kinds of services?

4. How much coordination of services (if any) do various agencies attempt?

5. What major obstacles does your community face in seeking to deliver these services?

6. What don't you know about crisis intervention services? Where could you find out?

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Framing the Issues

When you take a picture, you choose what parts of the landscape to include in the frame. Will you capture the expanse of the meadow? Or will you zoom in on a dew-covered flower bud? How you frame the photo through the lens of the camera makes a lot of difference to you and others in how you understand the meadow. Neither picture is necessarily better than the other; each is unique in its power.

How do you frame the issues of your youth and community? You may want to use a wide-angle lens and look at the larger picture. Or you may wish to zoom in on one area that is of special interest to you, while at the same time keeping the larger picture in mind.

Go back to your jottings on the worksheets and look for patterns. What stands out? What patterns emerge? What strengths do your young people bring? What are their struggles? What is your community doing to make itself a healthier place for young people? What is lacking? Remember, this is not the time to figure out how to solve the problems. It is the time to identify the most significant issues.

From what you have pulled together in information, hunches, hopes, and fears, what do you think are the most serious issues your youth and community face? What issues absolutely must be dealt with in order to help your young people grow up healthy? (See Worksheet 9.)

Putting Together the Information

Go back to your jottings and look for patterns in what you have written. What are the strengths your youth bring to the situation? What are their struggles? What is your community doing to make itself a healthier place for young people?

1. When you think about the young people of your community . . .

What pleases you most?	What disturbs you most?
1.	1.
2.	2.
3.	3.
4.	4.
5.	5.
6.	6.

2. Reflect on what you know about your youth and your community. What makes you . . .

- hopeful?

- fearful?

3. From what you have pulled together, what do you think are the three most serious issues your youth and community face?

4. What issues must be dealt with to help your young people grow up healthy?

5. With whom could you talk about how they view the issues, if you choose to do so?

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Building on What You've Learned

Clarifying and distilling information is a vital—sometimes overlooked—step in moving toward constructive action. Without synthesizing information appropriately, you risk initiating efforts that do not address real needs, or that do not have the desired effect. By collecting solid information, you develop a new, thoughtful perspective that will shape the way you view youth and your community.

But new knowledge itself isn't the ultimate goal here, but a means to a greater good: making the community a better place for youth. And unless knowledge is translated into action, it will have little impact.

At this stage, some people move immediately into thinking of strategies and solutions. However, we discourage such an approach. Instead, we believe that action will be most effective and lasting when it is guided and sustained by a vision of the type of community you would like to have for youth. So before thinking about solutions, the next chapter focuses on creating your personal vision for your community.

3. Create a Clear Vision

MOST OF US KNOW people we call "visionaries." You may have known—or heard stories about—people who founded your school or a local Y or a park board. If you had asked them to reflect on how they found the energy to undertake their tasks, these visionaries would likely tell about a clear picture that they had in their minds of the property on which the building or park would be located—long before the deed was signed or the groundbreaking occurred. In their mind's eye they "saw" the place; they "heard" young people and adults talking and learning and playing together; they "felt" the energy and positive interactions of people working and living together. Whether these visionaries expressed their vision as "positive youth development" or not, they likely had a deep sense of what they valued for their community and for youth.

We believe that every person has the potential to be a visionary. You can look ahead to the future and see creative possibilities. It starts with accepting a vast range of possibilities. You accept every idea as a possibility.

Creating a picture of the future is different from planning. When you create pictures, you are creative and name lots of possibilities. You think about what kind of future would please you the most—what is your "preferred future."

Later, when you plan, you choose from among many possibilities and set priorities. You become methodical, you decide on a path to get to your vision, you spell out the details.

Think of it like taking a trip. First you decide on your destination, then you pack your suitcase. For a trip in February, your decision about whether to go skiing in the mountains of Colorado or swimming in Florida makes all the difference in how you get to your destination and what you bring along.

Vision focuses on possibilities, not problems. Some people plan for the future by focusing on problems. As soon as they identify their problems, they jump into figuring out solutions to these problems. Too often, however, people who use this approach get bogged down and have little excitement or energy to get the job done. Problem-focused planning robs us of our enthusiasm and hope for the future.

A group of researchers headed by Dr. Ronald Lippitt studied this "problem focus" through a fascinating study.* They recorded conversations of dozens of

If people have a clear mental picture of the future they desire, they will have more energy and more motivation to achieve that future.

*Edward Lindaman and Ronald Lippitt, *Choosing the Future You Prefer* (Washington, DC: Development Publications, 1979).

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planning sessions where groups focused on problems. They analyzed the tapes and noticed a common pattern:

- After 15 minutes of discussion, the problem-focused groups were blaming someone else for their problems.
- After 30 minutes of discussion, people's voices were lower, they were speaking more slowly, and they were expressing more and more frustration.
- After 45 minutes, knowing they had to come up with solutions, they did so. However, most of their solutions were aimed at getting away from pain rather than moving toward a future they desired.

Lippitt and his associates believed that if people have a clear mental picture of the future they desire, they will have more energy and more motivation to achieve that future. And they believed that if people have a clear goal they will know much better what steps to take for achieving that goal. To help people create such a future picture in their minds, they tried a variety of methods that helped people turn from their problems to possibilities.

Having a vision of the future is practical. A clear vision points you in a direction you believe is important and worth your time and energy. A clear vision guides you in choosing the actions that will make a difference for the future.

Your Vision of Youth in Your Community

An effective and enjoyable way to create that clear picture in your mind is to imagine that it is the year 2000. Imagine that you have been working for several years to help youth develop in positive ways. Then imagine that your community is receiving national recognition for its efforts to make the community a healthier place for young people. A video documentary is being made, and you have been chosen to take the producer around the community.

What would you be showing the video producer that tells the story of how this community made itself into a healthier place for youth? Where would you go? Who would be there? What would the young people be doing? What would they be saying? As you think, keep in mind the concerns, resources, and values you identified in Chapter 2 (Worksheets 3-9).

Use Worksheet 10 to collect your thoughts. Many people write their visions in a paragraph. You may prefer to draw a picture. The format isn't important; what's important is for you to create in your own mind a picture of the type of community you would like youth to have.

Figure 1, which follows the worksheet, gives some sample visions that other people have developed for their youth and community. Yours will be different. However, these ideas may stimulate your thinking about new possibilities and themes.

Your Vision for Healthy Youth

Imagine it is now the year 2000. You are walking through the community observing the young people. What kind of young people are you seeing in this community? Where are they? What are they doing? What are they saying? Who are they with? What are they feeling? Jot down a few phrases that describe your vision. Make it concrete so others can see what you see. Use pictures and symbols if you wish.

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FIGURE 1

Visions From Other Places

Each concerned person has his or her own vision for youth. The following visions are from other people and other communities. Use these as springboards as you think about youth in your community.

Sample Vision #1: Resource Awareness, Sharing, and Use

I see a wealth of people with expertise in youth issues providing resources to the community so that people do not have to pay to have access to them. Resources are shared rather than duplicated. Materials, workshops, programs, and training are available for multiple groups. There is a central place in the community where someone can ask, "Does someone have this resource?"

Sample Vision #2: Community Health Fair

I see a community health fair under way on the lawn on a warm spring day. Local health organizations have tents and booths displaying their services. A nearby hospital has a booth for taking blood samples, health evaluations, etc. People have been invited by large signs, mailed invitations, and attractive brochures. People are standing at registration tables getting information on what is available in the community to help them improve their health.

Sample Vision #3: Cooperation Among Community Organizations

I feel a sense of cooperation that permeates youth-serving organizations in our community. There is no turf protection, as all of us realize we can't do the job alone. We tell each other: "We have very limited resources. We need all the help we can get from each other." Everyone is willing to pitch in to do hard work and go beyond turf issues because we all need each other to survive.

Sample Vision #4: Community Gardening Project

I see a community garden fostering cooperation among the people of the neighborhood, to create a space of beauty for quiet reflection, closeness to earth and seasons, and good will in the community. I see retired gardeners partnering with young people to teach new skills and build relationships as they garden together. I see a grass and leaf recycling effort that uses our agency as a "hub," reaching into people's daily lives and replenishing the earth with nutrients.

Sample Vision #5: Strong Intergenerational Relationships

I see a group of older men and women talking with a group of teens. They are gathered together in the home of one of the older people present. I hear shared conversations. Each person has an opportunity to talk and contribute to the discussion. The atmosphere is relaxed as they talk about their life stories, their values. I feel excited, curious, and heartened to see these generations together.

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Vision to Reality

You have just completed one of the most significant tasks you could undertake. When you have a clear vision, you have a sense of a future that is worth your efforts. You have a way of evaluating the many possibilities of what you could do.

Creating a concrete vision for youth can be an invigorating experience. Many people find that they want to share their vision with someone else. Indeed, sometimes the vision becomes more clear when you describe it to someone else who can share in the possibilities. The other person may share your vision, opening up even more possibilities.

On the other hand, if you prefer to keep this conversation with yourself for the time being, do so. You may decide that, right now, you want the vision to be yours. That's fine, since the vision can motivate you in your own work.

Either way, you now are ready to move into action—to do something that makes the vision a little closer to reality. The first action is to decide what action to take.

4. Take Action . . . One Step at a Time

A vision becomes reality when you take actions—even small ones—that benefit youth in your community.

CREATING A VISION is a vital step in making a difference for youth. It can help set a direction and open new possibilities—some of which you may never have thought about before. It can also help to provide the energy and focus that keep you going through the sometimes-difficult challenges you'll face when trying to have an impact for good.

Before deciding what action to take next, think about what you already are doing that is helping to achieve your vision. After all, you may be investing energy in efforts that work toward the future you've envisioned, and these efforts are an essential launching pad for your new actions.

When you describe what you are currently doing, take into account all of your activities, large and small. If you sometimes babysit an eight-year-old nephew, you are contributing to a healthy young person and serving your community by providing family support (one sign of a healthy community). If you lead activities at your church, you are enhancing young people's development within your faith tradition. If you are on a committee planning a Martin Luther King Jr. Day party, you are promoting mutual respect and understanding . . . You get the picture. List everything you are doing that is helping to make your vision a reality.

Now imagine you are expanding your efforts, using Worksheet 11 to guide you. What else do you see yourself doing that would help to make your vision a reality? What's different and the same about these new activities and actions?

Whenever we think of doing something differently than we are doing now, we carry on an "internal dialogue." Within each of us are voices that support us and are enthusiastic about our new idea for action. These supportive voices within give us energy and courage to go ahead.

Also within us are voices of caution, self-protection. They can protect us from getting in too deep, from overlooking certain realities that we should take into consideration, for our own sake and for the sake of others. Take a moment to "listen" to that dialogue within yourself.

You can anticipate, as well, people who know you and their reactions to your vision for yourself. There is an "external dialogue"—individuals and groups who have responses to your vision. Anticipating them will help you choose what actions to take.

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Listening to Internal and External "Voices"

Current Realities

Everything you're doing already that helps make your vision a reality:

Your Vision for Yourself

Over the next three years, how do see yourself helping to make your vision become a reality? What are you doing, who are you with, what are you saying, and how do you feel?

Reality Checks on My Vision

	Internal voices	External voices
Those expressing support and enthusiasm		
Those expressing caution and self-protection		

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Taking a First Step

After this check on realities, you may be ready to make a beginning action plan. You can come back to this plan again and again, depending on the information you gather and the actions you try out. For now, where would you start, and when?

Your actions need not be large and public. If you're a parent who feels that you are on too many committees and are neglecting your own child, you may decide to get off one committee and dedicate that time to your child.

If you have been focused mostly on your personal life, you may want to reach out to one young person as a mentor. A retired person may decide that volunteering in a youth agency office is one way to help. A school principal may decide to share an analysis of issues with a faculty committee. Worksheet 12 can help you identify your actions.

Celebrating Progress

One key to assuring that you stick with your actions is to celebrate your efforts. After all, it's easy to get frustrated or apathetic when you don't see any progress being made on a large task.

Don't wait until the year 2000 to see how it all turns out. Celebrate as you go. Many people in developing countries have learned the secret of keeping themselves renewed and hopeful in the midst of extreme poverty, hardship, and injustice. They stop the work for a while and celebrate what they have achieved. Small celebrations go a long way.

How will you celebrate each small step that you take? Worksheet 12 also includes space to record ways that you'll observe and celebrate milestones. Remember these milestones, and they will help to energize you along the way.

Acting and Celebrating

Actions You'll Take

1. What risks and initiatives will you take to help achieve your vision for youth and your community?

2. Who else could help?

3. When and how will you start?

Milestones You'll Celebrate

1. What milestones will you celebrate in your efforts?

2. How will you celebrate your progress?

3. Who else could you include in your celebrations?

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Involving Others in Action

If you have asked others for information and insights to add to your own understanding, you no doubt have discovered like-minded people who also are concerned and active in youth and community issues. You may be reading different newspaper articles, magazines, or books than you used to. Perhaps you are going to different meetings than before, seeing and hearing from different people. You are discovering resources you didn't know in your community. And you may be discovering appalling gaps in resources you believe youth need.

Again your question may be, What do I do with what I know?

Once again, you don't need to "start big." In fact, it's better to begin by enlarging your own understanding and experience, and then deciding whether you should be a part of a larger effort.

People who study change efforts tell us that individuals who are committed to involving others in a long-term change process go through four stages of widening the circle of involvement.*

1. **Nurture support from like-minded people.** Typically a person talks with a few other trusted, like-minded people to learn more about the issues and possible solutions.

2. **Hold public conversations.** A supportive group may decide to take its concerns, insights, and questions to a broader arena. This step helps them discover who else is thinking about the issues and what others' insights are. It also is a testing ground for one's own understanding.

3. **Create a core network for influential action.** A small group of people (from six to 15) may decide to organize and work with formal and informal structures in a community to bring about a particular kind of change.

4. **Collaborate for youth.** Efforts may include widening the circle even farther and working with numerous organizations or sectors of the community on specific programs or strategies in positive child and youth development.

Any positive action within any of these stages is a force for good, and none is necessarily "better" than others. What's important is to find a place and role within one of these stages where you feel comfortable and where you believe you can make a difference in moving toward your vision. At each stage, you must decide whether to move to the next, more complex stage, or whether your best decision is to give yourself to the stage you are currently in. The next four chapters explore ways you can be involved in each of these stages.

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*Parker J. Palmer, *Divided No More: A Movement Approach to Educational Reform* (unpublished paper).

5. Nurture Support from Like-Minded People

AS YOU SHARE your concerns and gather information, you'll likely discover people who are struggling with the same issues as you are. Some of them are people you especially trust with your concerns and questions. You feel free to share openly with them and to acknowledge to them that you don't know everything and that you don't have a grand scheme for addressing every youth concern in your community. These people can become important allies as you begin to build interest and concern in your community.

Gaining these people's support and involvement need not be a complicated or involved process. Invite a few like-minded individuals (three, four, or five people) to get together to share information and to learn from one another. Then set simple ground rules and use a simple group process to help the group operate smoothly and efficiently.

Sharing your concerns and hopes with people whom you trust is the first step in widening your circle of concern about youth.

Guidelines for Supportive Groups

Supportive groups are typically made up of very busy people who really don't have time for one more meeting, so it's imperative that your meetings be worthwhile to them. A few guidelines used by many of these types of groups can help to make these meetings more energizing than draining. "These meetings actually seem to free up my time," people report. Here are a few guidelines that they find make their meetings worthwhile. (You may even want to post these on newsprint on the wall during your meetings as a constant reminder.) Use Worksheet 13 to help plan your supportive group.

- **Be clear about your purpose.** A group of like-minded people isn't the same as an action group. (It's too early to form an action group.) The group's purpose is to support one another as you explore your concerns and understandings about young people and your community. You are not a committee with a task. You are here to understand a complex situation more fully than one person can understand it alone.
- **Carefully select the people to include.** Choose people with whom you feel free to share openly, rather than people for an action group.
- **Hold regular, limited meetings.** Start by scheduling no more than three meetings—for example, every other week for 60-90 minutes each time,

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depending on your schedules. Keep a firm ending time for the meeting. At the end of the third meeting, decide what to do next.

- **Have informal and candid dialogue.** Keep discussions informal, confidential, and above all, candid. Meet where you can have privacy. You want to hear many different points of view, so you need a place that you can freely express doubts, concerns, and incomplete information.
- **Select a meeting host.** Someone should serve as host for each meeting. (As convener, you may choose to assume this role, at least at first.) The host has several basic roles:
  1. to remind the group of the purpose of the meeting;
  2. to make sure everyone gets a chance to talk and that no one talks too much;
  3. to keep the group on track, pulling it back to the core concerns when it strays;
  4. to summarize what you've all been saying; and
  5. to make sure the group decides where and when to meet again, and what you want to talk about then.
- **Practice dialogue.** Your discussions should aim to help individuals gain insights that simply could not be achieved alone. Cultivate the art of asking questions that help another person clarify what is being said. As a group, decide that "not knowing" is a mark of an adult who is an eager learner. (This decision bans one-upping!)
- **Take time.** Take time to gather information you need to understand the situation more responsibly. Take time to try a number of different interpretations of what is going on among your young people. Discipline yourselves not to jump into action before you understand the issues and have explored a range of possible solutions. (This discipline keeps you from thinking that "quick fixes" will solve problems.)

Your meetings will be most helpful if you include, over time, the elements of information, vision, and action, which were explored in Chapters 2-4. The material that follows here looks at each of these in the format of a 60- to 90-minute discussion. Of course, you may choose other structures, such as holding more than one discussion at the information-gathering stage.

Planning for Your Supportive Group

1. What is the purpose for your group and its meetings?

2. Who would you hope to include in your group? Is each one someone with whom you are comfortable sharing openly?

3. When will you hold meetings? How many meetings will participants commit to before renegotiating?

4. Who will be the meeting host?

5. What other ground rules do you think are important for your group to fulfill its purpose?

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Discussion #1: Gather and Interpret Information

In your first 60- to 90-minute discussion, you could share your immediate concerns (and have people share theirs), plus your reasons for inviting these people. If individuals don't know each other, include time for introductions.

One useful way to structure this first discussion is to lead the group through the steps outlined for individuals in Chapters 1 and 2. You might, for example, begin by talking about your own background and experiences, then select questions in Worksheets 1 and 2 to guide a discussion of other people's motivations. Duplicate them if you think they would be helpful.

Then move on to the youth and community issues as you all perceive them, using a broader framework than your own experience. You could briefly describe the framework outlined on pages 16-17, then use some of Worksheets 3-8 and other resources to pool your knowledge of what's really going on among youth. Don't overlook what each of the participants currently is doing in the community that is addressing some of the concerns you have shared. Invite each person to tell what they are doing for youth in your community.

If you discover that you know less than you think you should, ask different people to take the worksheets and gather specific information from knowledgeable people to report back in a future discussion.

Throughout this discussion, the host should take special responsibility to draw out each person, because some people may be reluctant to tell what they're doing to help youth. Remind them that no single act is insignificant. Affirm one another in your positive private and public actions.

Your supportive group can continually redefine the issues as you understand them. This is one of the most significant tasks you can perform. And it is an ongoing process, because the more you learn, the more complex you realize the issues are. Your challenge is to focus the concerns and identify a few most significant issues. The way you define issues provides the framework you'll use for action, either public or private. To help your group come to an understanding of emerging concerns and priorities, use Worksheet 9 to distill the key strengths and concerns that your group perceives in the community.

Finally, for each of your meetings, think of ways to inspire hope. You might choose to close the meeting by sharing (and have others share) a source of inspiration, such as the story of someone in your community who inspires you. (Likely you will identify several people who are an inspiration to all of you.)

Discussion #2: Share Visions of a Better Future

Begin the second discussion by reviewing the conclusions from your previous discussion. If you used Worksheet 9, it offers a condensed review. Then share the information on the power of a vision in contrast to the immobilizing effects of focusing only on problems (pages 27-28).

Suggest ways participants might envision the future they want for youth in

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your community. Invite them to write out—or share verbally with someone else doing the writing—their visions. Worksheet 10 and Figure 1 will help everyone focus on a clear picture of the future.

As you conclude your discussion, ask each person to read aloud his or her vision—without critique from others. You may discover that people in your group share many aspects of a vision. Regardless of the action you take as a group, the vision you share can have a powerful effect on the individual lives of each member. Each of you can hold that picture in your minds, and it will guide your daily behavior and decisions about your future, in small ways and large. You know you are not alone in your dreams, but have the support from others as well.

After the meeting, make copies of the visions everyone shares, even if they seem incomplete. These are not intended to be final documents, but are intended to capture some of the feelings, aspirations, and visions of the people you've brought together. Give copies to each person.

Discussion #3 (and Following): Action and Support

One of the most valuable functions of a supportive group is that you can help one another experiment with new ways of addressing problems and building on strengths. Tell one another what you have learned during a meeting, and whether you will apply what you have learned in practical situations. Many questions can elicit this sort of dialogue:

- Do you have a new perspective that you want to check out with the group?
- Is there an issue you'd like to focus attention on in a future meeting?
- Do you have difficult information you want to share with someone responsible for working with youth?

Each individual must make a decision about how to address the issues and build on the strengths. The group should honor each person's decision. You may decide as a group to initiate some public action, though not all of you may wish to be a part of the public action. Some of you may wish to stop your involvement with the group at this point and use your new insights and information to help you carry out your present work more effectively.

Whatever the personal change each person wants to make, let the group members help each other decide how to go about it effectively. Have people report back how their effort went, and ask for help and support in their next steps.

Your supportive group may find Worksheet 14 useful in organizing your thoughts. Copy the blank worksheet for each major concern you've identified. Then use this sheet to guide your responses to the concern. This information also becomes a good outline for presenting your concerns to other people.

If your group decides to work together for wider involvement, consider initiating public conversations on the issues—the focus of the next chapter.

Basic Planning Guidelines

This worksheet is designed to outline a complete visionary planning process. Use it to guide your own thoughts, or use it in workshops with other groups that are concerned about youth.

The Issue that Concerns Us

Our Shared Vision of the Future

Our Goal

(A goal sets a direction but is never fully achieved. Write one or two sentences that establish a clear direction for the future. If you have several goals, use different sheets for each one.)

Issues to Address to Achieve Your Goal*

1. What need does your goal address?

2. How can you create or intensify people's awareness of this need?

3. Who are the people who will be involved in implementing your proposed change?

4. How can you involve them meaningfully?

5. What are the values cherished by your people that we should address when seeking their support?

* Based on *Change Takes Time: A Conceptual Model for Planned Change*, Copyright © 1991 by Search Insti

6. Who are key opinion-makers whose approval or endorsement you need?

7. How can you involve them meaningfully?

8. What small-scale efforts (e.g. pilots, field tests) would demonstrate viable ways of achieving your goal?

9. How can you assure success of your first effort?

10. What skills need to be developed for maintaining the sustained change?

11. What feedback procedures would assure periodic evaluation for improvement?

12. What kind of resistance ought you to expect?

13. What supportive forces are helping you?

14. What concrete actions could you take to overcome resistance?

15. What concrete actions could you take to utilize supportive forces?

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6. Hold Public Conversations

Public conversations give people an opportunity to speak in ways and in places that others can hear them, respond to them, and be influenced by them.

AS SUPPORTIVE GROUPS develop, they learn to translate their private concerns into public issues, and they grow in their ability to give voice to these issues in public and compelling ways.

You and your supportive group can become a catalyst and instigator to talk about a healthy community and healthy youth and create opportunities for people to talk to each other. Talking is a way to start making the community a healthier place for youth. Simply making young people the focus of conversations is an important step in raising awareness and responses throughout the community.

Some observers of our democratic system point out that in recent times we have spent too little time in public discourse. We rush toward solutions (too frequently legislation) without clearly defining the issues. We don't have clarity before we make laws and rules. Then, when the laws and rules create more problems than they solve, we get caught in grievances and court-like proceedings. In a democracy, we have the privilege of open conversation among people who view a situation from many different points of view.* Thus, it's prudent to use the privilege of public conversations before you move into action.

"Public conversations" means that people are given an opportunity to speak so that others can hear them, respond to them, and be influenced by them. Public conversations should take place before anyone brings recommendations for action (for example, the city council or the school board or the Y council). In public conversations, people's ideas can be tested and refined.

Think about the times and places people discuss community concerns: during coffee breaks, in carpools, over lunch, in checkout lines, at child care centers, in shops, at council meetings, in neighborhood meetings, in teachers' lounges, at church fellowship meetings, at PTA meetings, in coffee shops, bars, laundries, and gas stations. These are places to start in informal ways. The more people you talk with, the more information you will gather, and the more accurately and adequately you will frame the issues.

A public conversation as we define it here, however, is more formal. It may take place on the agenda of a parent–teacher council, or a youth committee at a church, or a faculty meeting at school, or a luncheon meeting of a service club. Or it may be a specially called meeting in a neighborhood, city, county, or orga-

*John M. Bryson and Barbara C. Crosby, *Leadership for the Common Good* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 1992).

nization. You may already have ongoing programs in place that provide a forum for such a dialogue.

No matter how many people are involved, it is important to plan carefully so that you give people a good opportunity to hear and be heard. A few guidelines for sponsoring public conversations will help assure people that they are being heard and treated fairly.

Getting Ready for a Public Conversation

One temptation for your supportive group is to expect other people to come to a meeting with the same understanding and insight that your group has acquired through several meetings. Although you may share some information, we recommend that you concentrate at the point where others are. Use a public conversation not only to give information, but also to gather information you don't already have. That information involves how others experience the youth and community issues you are addressing.

When people come to a public meeting, they expect their time to be well used, and they expect to be heard. They also want to know that something will happen as a result of the time and effort they give. Therefore, organizers of a public conversation will win trust and learn more if they put considerable thought into the purpose, the content, and the process for the meeting.

- **Purpose.** Write down your purposes for the meeting. They might be:
  1. To give citizens an opportunity to talk about how well we are—or are not—helping young people grow up healthy.
  2. To learn who else is interested in continuing these public conversations.
- **Content.** Decide what content areas need to be presented to achieve your purposes. You may have completed a survey of youth (such as *Profiles of Student Life),* and want to present the highlights. The worksheets in Chapter 2 may also be good starting points, or use portions of Worksheet 14.
- **Participants.** Decide who should be invited in order to make sure many points of view are heard. (Don't overlook young people.) How are you most likely to get people there? Public announcements? Personal phone calls? Invitations to organizations?
- **Process.** Carefully design a process that will help you achieve your purposes. Your process should give participants an opportunity to learn by listening to others, asking questions, and sharing their own points of view. Worksheet 15 outlines some format options, with space for you to plan.
- **Meeting room.** Choose a meeting room in a location that will not exclude people who might feel uncomfortable in certain settings. Set up the meeting room so that . . .
  1. Everyone is personally welcomed as he or she arrives.
  2. People can talk in groups of three, four, or five. You could use round tables, or you could arrange chairs in small semi-circles (not straight rows).

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3. It is easy for people to jot down a few words on scratch paper. (Place the paper and a pencil for each person on chairs ahead of time.)

Hosting a Public Conversation

Your agenda will vary depending on your circumstances. We suggest that these elements be included in some way for a smoother, more effective meeting.

1. Welcome and purpose. Open by welcoming people and announcing the purposes of the event. For example, you might announce that the purposes are:

- To give citizens of our community an opportunity to express our concerns about the youth of this community and about how well we are—or are not—helping them grow up to be healthy adults.
- To determine if anyone is interested in continuing these conversations.

2. The process. Explain the process you will use. Tell participants that they will hear many points of view during this meeting, and that the process will help that to happen.

If you are holding an open forum, tell them:

- How long any one audience member may have the floor
- How many times one person may speak before all others who wish have had a chance
- How questions will be handled
- To identify themselves by their name and their affiliation when they speak.

If you are asking people to work in small groups, tell them that everyone will have a chance to think privately, to speak without being interrupted, and to be represented to the total group.

3. Why we are here—our concerns. Share a few of the concerns that you and your supportive group have shared that prompted you to call this meeting. Do this briefly. Make it clear that you are here to learn together what all of you think is happening to the youth in your community, not to come to solutions or take specific actions at this time.

4. Get acquainted. Invite people to get to know the others in their semi-circle (or at their table). If they don't know names, introduce themselves. If the group isn't too large, ask people each to stand and give their name and what group/organization they represent (e.g., parent, school, hospital, city government, faith community, etc.).

Then ask people to take a total of 10 minutes, making sure everyone gets a chance to talk, for people each to tell their small group something like this: *What's different for young people growing up today than when I was a young person.*

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Choosing a Public Conversation Format

In planning a public conversation in your community, do you want . . .

A Presenter or Presenters?

Presenters can provide baseline information to get people thinking about common issues. A local leader or expert may be available to present. Remember, also, that a good videotape may also be used as a "presenter," as long as someone is prepared to handle questions that arise during the presentation.

- How much time will each presenter be given?
- What content should each presenter cover?
- How will you handle questions from the audience? (Will they write them out and hand them in? raise their hands?)
- Will you provide handouts or resources to which presenters should refer? If so, what resources?

An Open Forum?

This format allows individuals to come forward and give their individual points of view. Be aware of the hazard of holding public meetings on controversial and divisive topics, since opponents are more likely than supporters to attend and to be vocal. Start your public conversations with general issues of concern in which many can share.

- How much time will any one audience member be allowed to have the floor? How will you monitor the length of time?
- How many times can one audience member speak before all others who wish have had a chance?

Small Work Groups

You can divide people into groups of three, four, or five to share their points of view, and ask the work groups to report to the total group on their conversations.

- How will you give people time to think privately?
- How will you assure that each person can speak without being interrupted?
- How will each person's concerns be represented to the total group?

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5. Focus on the issues. The way you focus on the issues will depend on the format you've chosen. Here are some suggestions.

- *If you use presenters:* Introduce the presenter(s), hand out any materials, and tell people how you will handle questions after the presentation. Explain what will happen after the presentation(s); that is, how and when those who are participants will have a chance to speak.
- *If you use an open forum:* Invite individuals to speak. If there is a time limit, the person who is the "timer" should be near the place where people speak to give a signal. Close the portion of time when people are speaking at an "open mike," and invite questions from the audience. Summarize what you have heard. Invite people who are interested in continuing to work on these issues to raise their hands and to see you immediately afterward.
- *If you use work groups:* We suggest a three-step process that will give every person a chance to talk, to hear several other people, and to know the main points of what everyone in the room has said.
  1. Ask people to work alone for a few minutes, not talking with others. Have them jot on paper completions to these two sentences: When I think about the youth in our community, I am most pleased about . . . When I think about the young people in our community, I worry most about. . .
  2. Invite participants to spend a few minutes in their small groups talking about what they are most pleased about. Suggest that starting with positive things is important, because some groups deteriorate into gripe sessions and overlook all the strengths they can build on. After that, discuss what they are most worried about. Have each group appoint someone to write main points on newsprint and report to the total group. After groups report, summarize what you've heard. Point out how valuable it is to have many people's points of view. Ask if individuals want to add anything to the reports.
  3. Close by asking people to talk in their groups about whether any of them would like to meet again, and if so, who else should be here and what information they might want as part of the next meeting. Call for their reports to the total group. Thank people for coming, and commit yourself publicly to responding to their suggestions. Ask if anyone wants to help with the next meeting. Invite them to talk with you after the meeting.

After the Conversations

Public conversations can expand to larger group meetings, to open forums during which you present some information and invite others to pool their concerns and hopes as well. It is critical not to come off as experts (you're not posing solutions, and you are still working on a lot of hunches). Rather, you are concerned people who want to learn how others view youth in your community.

What can be gained by public conversations? Mostly, you begin to create a language of change, a language of concern and hope and vision. You give people an opportunity to name their worries and their yearnings for change. And you begin to tap the leadership potential of many people who want to make a difference. These people can become the core of your network, which is the focus of Chapter 7.

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7. Create a Core Network for Influential Action

THROUGH YOUR PERSONAL conversations, group meetings, public forums, and/or surveys, you now may be convinced that your efforts should become more formal and that you need people to work together for action. A core network of like-minded people may be your next step—if you don't already have such a network in place in your community. Unlike support from like-minded people and public conversations (the previous two chapters), a core network is established specifically to influence policy and take action.

A core network of committed leaders can work together to identify specific community concerns and encourage others to become involved in youth issues.

How to Choose a Core Network

Your core network is a group of people you consider to be effective and trusted leaders. By leaders, we mean people who are willing to take a hard look at the situation, agree on what they believe are the major issues that have to be faced, begin to build a shared vision of the kind of community they want to help promote, and take action with a lot of other people to get the job done. More specifically:

"Core" refers to a small group of six to twelve carefully selected people who decide to get organized in a more formal way. This group will do very disciplined work together over a period of time, with the intention of engaging larger numbers of people later on. So choose people who . . .

- have a track record of getting things done in their own place of influence, whether that's a school, an agency, a religious congregation, a neighborhood, or the entire community.
- know how to think and work with other people.
- will commit to at least two or three meetings initially to decide what needs to be done next. (They need to know up front that you want to form a serious group, but that each individual is expected to decide how much to be involved on a long-term basis. Sometimes one person starts coming and then suggests someone else better qualified. Or sometimes individuals decide that this is not the right place to put their efforts.)

"Network" means that each member of the core group brings to the group a different world of expertise and contacts and influence. It means that an influential person in one's neighborhood and a school superintendent each

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bring an understanding that the other needs. Choose people who . . .

- are known for their concern for young people and the community.
- know what's going on among the young people they are in contact with.
- are recognized for having done something positive for the community.

"Like-minded people" means that the members should share a common concern and understanding of the problem—not that they all think alike about particular issues or agendas. Pay more attention to the personal qualities of concern and commitment of individuals than to having every system in town represented. Choose people who . . .

- support change.
- can think of themselves as part of a shared process of learning and acting together, not as a "solo act" or a "solitary hero" for the community.
- are known as "opinion leaders" in their own group or organization and are good at explaining their concerns and hopes to others.
- are excellent listeners, and show that what they learn from other people truly influences what they do next.
- want to share their vision with others, but also sincerely want to find out what others envision for their community.

If you decide to involve multiple sectors in community-wide planning, that's a much later step.

What does this core network do? We suggest you organize your work around the same three tasks for individual and community change: information, vision, and action. This process may take several meetings, or it could occur in a retreat setting where people can have intensive time to focus on the issues. If you already have a network in place in your community, suggest this process as a focused activity for coming weeks or months.

Gather Information and Frame Issues

You could use Worksheets 3-8 as guides to identify the information you have from your individual experience and the other sources you have involved to this point. However, you will go much farther than these sources.

Go at this information stage in an organized way. Assign group members to gather factual information (each person could be assigned one or more of the worksheets as a framework for gathering information). If you have held public conversations, integrate that information as well.

Hundreds of communities across the United States have found survey findings invaluable at this stage. The new information helps to reframe issues, break stereotypes and myths, and identify hidden concerns. RespecTeen sponsors communities to conduct *Profiles of Student Life* for this purpose (see page 63).

Be sure to write everything down. As busy people, you'll need to go back to these records so you remember where you left off last time. It will save you lots of time in the long run to have these lists (as well as others that you decide are important). When your group gathers, pull the information together, using newsprint to summarize the group's findings as follows:

1. Write "Major Assets of Our Youth" on top of a piece of newsprint. Use bold pen so everyone can see. Call for each person's point of view on major assets of youth. Don't discuss whether or not you agree with each other at this point. Just make the list. Make sure every person's point of view as well as references to factual data are on the list. Use separate pieces of newsprint to list all the "Major Youth Deficits," "At-Risk Behaviors," "Prosocial Involvement," "Major Community Strengths," and "Major Community Deficits." Work with the group to fill in all the sheets.

2. Hang the six sheets of newsprint where everyone can see them. Then, one sheet at a time, agree on, and draw a big star by:

- The three *strongest assets* of youth in your community
- The three *most disturbing deficits* of your youth
- The three *most encouraging signs of prosocial involvement* among youth
- The *most serious at-risk behaviors* faced by youth
- The three *assets you're most proud of in your community* in promoting healthy youth
- The three *deficits you're most troubled by in your community*

3. Now look over the starred items on all five lists. Do certain key problems show up on several lists? Do certain key strengths show up on several lists? Write them down on two pieces of newsprint (one, "Key Problems"; one, "Key Strengths").

4. On the basis of all of this information, what do you believe are the most critical issues your community must face? A critical issue could be defined as "a problem that we absolutely must deal with, because if we don't deal with it, our youth and the community will seriously suffer." List these on newsprint titled "Critical Issues."

Build a Shared Vision

1. After you have agreed on the critical issues you must address, take a good break. Have a snack, get some exercise, get fresh air, do something enjoyable—even if for only a few minutes. It will help you shift gears to thinking about the future.

2. Give each person a copy of Worksheet 10, two or three pieces of paper, and a pen. Ask them to think into the future about three years. Ask them to imagine "healthy youth in this community." Ask them to imagine what those youth would

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be doing, where they would be, who they would be with, what they would be saying, how they would be feeling. Ask them to write on the worksheet what they see, what they hear, what they feel. If they prefer, invite them to draw pictures or symbols of healthy youth. You may want to read a sample or two from Figure 1 on page 30 or the ones that follow in this chapter.

3. Ask people each to read (or show) their "picture of the future" to the others. Wait with discussion until all "pictures" have been presented.

4. Agree on what parts of the picture all the images have in common. Which ones are different from the rest?

5. Jot down on a piece of newsprint the main three, four, or five "pictures" that you can agree on. These are extremely important and should be typed and circulated to every member of the core network. They become the basis of your dream, your vision.

Take Action

Does your core network want to continue meeting? For the sake of example, let's suppose that you have framed two of the issues in your community as lack of affordable day care and lack of after-school activities for young teenagers. Your issues and visions could look like this:

Sample Issue 1: Lack of affordable day care for low-income families. Too many low-income young families cannot afford day care, and therefore they are unable to provide adequate income for the needs of their families. In addition, too many young children are left unsupervised by parents who are employed and can't afford day care. Children who live in poverty or are unsupervised are at risk already and are likely to be highly at risk when they reach their teenage years.

- **Sample Vision 1: Helping young families.** It is three years from now. We see a community in which every family with young children is supported by others in the community. We see "adopted grandparents" taking them to a grassy park after school, we see programs for helping families. . . . We see day care facilities that are happy, positive places that help the children develop their potential. Young families feel more competent and confident and know that this community wants to be a good place to raise youth.

Sample Issue 2: Lack of after-school activities for young teenagers. Only youth who are active in sports have after-school activities provided. A majority of our single parents are employed, and, in more than half of two-parent families, both parents are employed. Therefore, a significant number of young teenagers is unsupervised after school. Our school and police records confirm that many unsupervised children are involved in at-risk behaviors.

- **Sample Vision 2: Supervised activities for young teenagers.** It is three years from now. We see the people who are responsible for parks working with our schools in providing after-school activities for young teenagers. On some days children are outside after school, enjoying recreation and other

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activities geared to their needs. Other days they are in the school building or a church basement getting help with school work. Park leaders, school leaders, parents and young people are working together to identify needs and plan the program. We see dollars available to pay supervisory persons.

You now are at a fork in the road, and have at least two options:

1. **Make a difference where you are.** Each person can commit to the visions you share and move back into his or her own world, working to make the visions a reality in that world. For example, a clergyperson might commit to sharing Issue #1 on the lack of affordable day care, and give leadership in the congregation for providing day care services. A school principal might offer to address Issue #2 by working with the city council member in charge of parks to develop after-school programs for young teenagers. These actions would be positive contributions and worthy outcomes of your work.

2. **Get more people involved.** You may believe that the problem is too big for any one institution to work alone, and that the problems overlap into the responsibilities of many organizations in the community. So you want to involve more people. You could gather more information from them, ask them to help frame the issues, build a shared vision among more people in the community, and take action in a united manner.

If you choose the first option, consider meeting with the other network members each month to report to each other what you are doing. Hold each other accountable. Offer to help each other. Share resources. Introduce each other to others who are concerned and involved. You may also choose to design future conversations around the structure outlined in Worksheet 14.

If you choose the second option, you are committing yourself to cooperation or collaboration among various entities in the community. Though more complex, it can be structured in a similar way to the processes you already have used. We now turn to how to build such a collaboration for youth.

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8. Collaborate for Youth

Collaboration can take many forms, depending on your community, its needs, and its resources.

MARSTOWN WAS SEEING a rise in youth problems. Many teens were not completing high school; some boys were turning to gang activities; and more single, young mothers were entering the child protection and welfare system. The technical college—the only one in the rural area—had a reputation of being a "drug school," and some promising young people from nearby communities didn't want to go there.

Leaders from the schools, non-profit social-service agencies, economic development councils, public health agencies, businesses, churches, and job-training centers met to discuss how to make an impact on the problems. Many agencies already provided services to teens, but many youth were falling through the cracks in the system.

After months of negotiation and discussion, the group decided to apply for funding for a collaborative program aimed at making their community a healthier place for young people to grow up. The funding became a catalyst for wide-ranging efforts on behalf of youth.

Collaboration—working together rather than alone—is happening across the country. And evidence shows that collaboration can result in healthier communities and healthier youth.

What Is Collaboration?

Although collaboration involves, at its heart, working together rather than alone, it is helpful to recognize various levels of working together. In *Communities Working Together for a Change,* Arthur Himmelman suggests four levels of involvement among organizations, with each type of involvement more complex than the other.* Before you decide to jump into collaboration in your community, pause to think about what you hope to achieve and what level of working together may be the most appropriate.

- **Networking** is the most informal way of working together. People *share information* for their mutual benefit. Even in a small community, it is useful to get people together from several sectors to find out what each is doing.

  If the concern is how to involve youth more actively in community ser-

*Arthur T. Himmelman, *Communities Working Together for a Change* (unpublished paper) (Minneapolis, MN: The Himmelman Group, 1991).

vice, for example, people with expertise and experience in the area get together to exchange information. Teachers, community leaders, a school counselor, a minister, a committed young person, and the director of a youth-serving organization might all be involved in issues of community service.

At a well-planned meeting, each can tell about the challenges and opportunities they face and what their organization is doing to deal with them. Inevitably at these meetings, people meet someone they need to be in touch with about their work, and their potential for effective service is greater.

- **Coordination** involves a willingness to exchange information and *alter activities* for mutual benefit and to achieve a common purpose.

  A latch-key program may draw some of the same young people as the park board's outreach program. The directors and volunteers can get together to tell which youth they're reaching, the activities they sponsor, and the problems they are having. They might decide to sponsor regular activities together, to enlarge the group and provide significant experiences to a larger group of youth than either individual program could do.

- **Cooperation** involves greater commitments. Besides exchanging information and changing activities so they can help each other, they *share resources* for their mutual benefit and to achieve a common purpose.

  Two suburban school districts, ten miles apart, faced financial hardship and had to cut back on administrative personnel. Yet they were under a state mandate to provide special education opportunities for students. They agreed to jointly hire an administrative director, who spends mornings in one district and afternoons in the other. The director has assigned additional responsibilities to competent "self-starter" administrative assistants in each district.

- **Full collaboration** includes not only exchanging information, altering activities and sharing resources, but also enhancing the capacity of other partners for mutual benefit and to achieve a common purpose.

  This is the most complex relationship. It is not a loosely pulled together occasional conversation about joint activities. Instead, it involves a clear commitment among two or more participating organizations, a definition of their joint purpose and their roles and responsibilities together and separately, accountability to one another, and sharing in resources and rewards—and risks. It takes time (often several months) to initiate a true "collaborative," and it takes energy and endurance to keep it going. But extensive research shows that most people say it's worth the effort because they see results.

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Launching a Collaboration with a Community Conference

Hundreds of communities across North America have been involved in "vision-to-action" types of conferences—one- or two-day meetings in which people pool information, look at it together, interpret what they find, and draw conclusions for action. They are guided by the belief that the future is a condition they can create out of their shared values and visions.

Give serious consideration, therefore, to sponsoring a community conference on healthy communities for youth. Whether or not a conference ends up in collaboration, it has multiple benefits. So we recommend it as an effective component in getting your community to address youth issues.

From such a conference, you can determine whether collaboration seems like the most helpful form of working together, and whether you would find support for the idea. And if a collaboration is already in place, a conference can give the group a new sense of focus, energy, and direction.

Before planning details of a community conference, imagine that you are holding a community-wide conference to talk about having a healthier community. Brainstorm about that conference and write down every idea on newsprint. You could focus your imaging in this way:

> Imagine it is six months from now and you are hosting a highly successful community conference on a healthy community for healthy youth. Imagine you are on a magic carpet flying invisibly around the room. You are very pleased with what is going on. What do you see? What do you hear? What do you feel? Who is in the room? What groups do they represent? What are they talking about? What are they feeling? How is the room arranged so good things can happen?

After you've listed all your ideas, look them over and decide which ones you like best. What things are most important about the conference as you envision it? Write them down. Don't worry yet about how to do the conference; focus on what you want it to be like.

Next, imagine it is six months *after* the conference. Using newsprint again, brainstorm about what you see happening in your community six months after the conference. Who is talking with whom? What are they doing together? What signs do you see that people are exchanging information, cooperating in programs, and coordinating some of their efforts?

Next you're ready to do the careful work of planning. Successful groups put a lot of thought and preparation into these conferences, with lots of lead time (up to six months). Answer questions such as these:

1. What will be the purpose of our community conference? A clear, concise purpose is essential to a successful conference. The purpose should make it clear that you are not focusing on youth as the problem. Rather, you are putting responsibility on the community to make itself a better place for young people's positive development. You are setting in motion a way for people to decide what

values the community should have for its youth and how the entire community will act on those values. Here's an example of a purpose statement:

> The purpose of our conference is to set in motion a planned change process whereby we . . .
>
> • build a shared vision of our [town, county] as a healthy community that helps our youth mature into socially responsible adults.
>
> • work together effectively to achieve our vision.

A conference can also be a natural follow-up to a community study of youth such as a RespecTeen-sponsored *Profiles of Student Life* survey. It can get the community thinking about what kind of community it wants for young people and how to address issues uncovered in the survey findings.

2. **Who should be at the community conference?** A community conference must involve people from many sectors. The active engagement of people in building a shared vision is the best motivator for action. Get citizens involved. The people who are closest to the problem understand it best, and they are also most likely to know solutions. You might invite:

- parents who are concerned about their children.
- businesspeople who are concerned about the workforce of tomorrow.
- teachers who are aware of changing needs among young people.
- youth group leaders to whom young people respond.
- church members who go camping with youth.
- single parents who can't find good day care for their children.
- young people themselves.

Only by hearing about the problems, potential, and dreams of citizens will the conference end up with practical information and workable solutions. Using the insights and talents of community members stimulates mutual respect among them and a greater understanding and acceptance of their differences. One result of having people from many parts of the community is improved community and human relationships.

Too often, however, citizens lack the resources to carry out the solutions. Various government and private agencies have resources, but lack in-depth understanding of the problems and practical solutions. Therefore, the conference should include community policy makers, professional educators, human service providers, and other community leaders.

Which of the following in your community are affected by youth issues? Which ones should be invited?

- public safety (courts, police, probation, parole services)
- social welfare (private and public human service agencies)

- recreation (public, private, commercial)
- education (public, private, parochial)
- health (physical, mental, public, private)
- the economic community (business, industry, labor)
- the racial/ethnic minority community (African American, Hispanic American, Asian American, Native American)
- the political community (elected and appointed officials as well as those with more informal political influence)
- the cultural community (art, music, dance, zoos, museums)
- the interfaith religious community
- mass media (television, radio, newspapers)

3. What are key elements of an effective conference? Think in terms of information–vision–action. Use some of the process ideas highlighted in Chapters 5-7 or the outlines shown in Worksheets 14 and 15. Be sure to build in objective information on youth and community. Survey data, trend information that illustrate the urgency of the issues, and stories from participants are all important.

Making a Collaboration Work

Starting and maintaining a collaborative is no easy or short-term task. "Dancing with an octopus" is the way one researcher describes collaboration, adding that trying to describe and understand how collaborations work is "a very messy science."* Nevertheless, studies of hundreds of collaboratives do give us clues about how to succeed rather than fail in collaborative endeavors.

If, based on your community conference, you believe that collaboration is essential to achieving your vision of a healthy community, or if you already have a collaboration in place, you would do well to read a hallmark (and very readable) report on collaborations by the Wilder Foundation.** Getting the lay of the land for collaboration could save you months of frustration.

Wilder researchers found six major factors that influence success in collaboratives, condensed here. Worksheet 16 has questions based on these factors to help your planning group think through how to build or maintain a successful collaboration.

Membership characteristics—Members share mutual respect, understanding and trust. An appropriate cross-section of members is actively involved. Members see the collaboration as in their self-interest, and they can compromise.

Making sure citizens are well-represented with public, private, and nonprofit

*Sharon L. Kagan, Ann Marie Rivera, and Faith Lamb Parker, *Collaborations in Action: Reshaping Services to Young Children and Their Families (Executive Summary)*, unpublished paper (New Haven, CT: The Bush Center in Child Development and Social Policy, Yale University, 1991).

**Amnerst H. Wilder Foundation, *Collaboration: What Makes It Work* (St. Paul, MN: Wilder Research Center, 1992).

Making a Collaboration Work

1. What organizations in your community are potential partners for a collaboration on behalf of youth?

2. What mission do the potential partners share?

3. What history do your community and the potential partners have in collaboration? How can you build on that history?

4. How can you build a sense of ownership among all the partners in the collaboration?

5. What can you do to ensure open and frequent communication among collaboration partners?

6. What funds and other resources can you tap to ensure the viability of your collaboration?

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organizations is essential for maintaining trust and hope and for assuring action. Citizens' voices must be heard, not just the voices of officials within organizations. Which partners in the community should be enlisted to achieve the vision? Have schools been somewhat isolated from the community? Have faith institutions been silently suffering because of changing religious norms and behaviors? Are businesses struggling with large-scale economic upheavals? How can they be involved in the vision?

Purpose—Collaborating partners share the same vision with a clearly agreed-on mission. The mission is unique—different from any single organization involved. Goals and objectives are clear and can realistically be attained. This is why it is so important to create a clear vision before getting involved in the nuts and bolts of getting the collaborative organized.

Ask participants what beliefs and values motivate them. (You might use Worksheets 1 and 2 to surface some of these issues among the leadership team.) These discussions help prepare people for sharing ideas about community issues and the need and opportunities for community change. They also build bonds of trust for longer-term change.

Environment—Some history of cooperation or collaboration in the community gives people greater trust that something can happen through collaboration. Groups that get together are seen as leaders in the community, and the collaborative has the support of key leaders who control resources.

Process/structure—Members feel "ownership" of both the way the group works and the results of its work. They develop clear roles and policy guidelines. They are flexible and adaptable, able to deal with changing conditions. And there are multiple levels of decision-making within each participating organization.

Communication—Open and frequent communication flows both formally and informally among collaboration members as they work on common projects.

Resources—Collaboratives have sufficient funds to support their operations. Essential, also, is a skilled convener who has organizing skills, interpersonal skills, an image of fairness, and respect from others as leaders of the group.

The Power of Collaborations

Forming true collaborations is a difficult and time-consuming task. But it can also be extremely rewarding. If you move toward the collaboration model of making a difference for youth, over time your efforts—along with those of the others involved—will work together in powerful ways to benefit youth in your community and to address the issues about which you are concerned.

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9. Change Takes Time

WHEN YOU'RE WATCHING young people deal with various issues, it is natural to want to jump in and find immediate solutions. You likely have sat on "youth committees" that think once-a-month pizza parties for youth after football games will solve complicated problems. Yet you know—and research confirms—that change takes time. When significant change occurs, it's because of thoughtful work of citizens and leaders in a community over a sustained period of time. Rarely does a group see significant change in the first year of work; it is more likely three or four years before you will see results.

Significant change can't happen overnight. But it can happen.

Why does change take so much time? A few reasons . . .

- It takes time to gather good information on problems and possible solutions.
- It takes time to ask other people to share their concerns and ideas.
- It takes time to develop a shared vision of the kind of community in which you all want children to grow up.
- It takes time for you to change personal commitments and keep your life in balance once you decide to do something different from before; and the same is true for every other concerned individual who decides to act.
- It takes time for an organization to realign how it goes about its business, even when the people involved are committed to the change. If some aren't committed, it takes even longer.
- It takes time to act; it takes time to reflect on what is happening because of your actions; it takes time to change course as circumstances change.

Just because change takes time doesn't mean that nothing can happen soon. One of the most important decisions a group can make is to plan for some early successes so you can demonstrate the value of working together and achieving a goal that no one group could achieve alone.

But whatever option you choose—from individual actions in the family to community-wide collaborations—it's important to remember that your efforts do matter, and that each positive action for youth makes your community a better place.

10. Resources for Working Together

These resources can help you or your organization work together to address youth issues in your community.

A NUMBER OF RESOURCES and programs are available to help individuals and communities build awareness of youth issues and work to make a difference for youth. RespecTeen gathers many of these resources and makes them available to communities for free or at a reduced cost through local Lutheran Brotherhood branches. Here are some that are available through RespecTeen as well as others available through Search Institute.

Community Collaboration Manual

This manual demystifies the skills and concepts needed to build an effective collaboration. It is an invaluable tool for groups that put together or join community coalitions. A limited number of copies of this manual are available through the RespecTeen coupon program. Contact your local RespecTeen officer, or call 1-800-888-3820 for information.

Getting the Word Out

This practical workbook is designed to help schools and communities that conduct *Profiles of Student Life* surveys share survey results in the community. It includes many ideas and processes for how to distill survey information and make other people aware of youth concerns. The booklet is sent free of charge to everyone who conducts a *Profiles of Student Life* survey. Others may order it through Search Institute.

Healthy Communities, Healthy Youth

Subtitled "How Communities Contribute to Positive Youth Development," this ground-breaking research report examines differences between communities with high levels of at-risk behaviors and those with low levels. It suggests key elements of community life that create a positive, healthy environment for young people. A summary of this report is available free of charge from RespecTeen. Call 1-800-888-3820.

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Profiles of Student Life Surveys

This RespecTeen-sponsored survey allows schools and communities to gather baseline data on the attitudes, behaviors, values, and interests of their 6th-12th grade students. The survey is conducted by Search Institute, which provides a detailed report to the community. A limited number of surveys are sponsored each year through the RespecTeen coupon program. Contact your local RespecTeen officer, or call 1-800-888-3820 for information.

"Speak for Yourself" Letter-Writing Contest

The "Speak for Yourself" curriculum guides social studies teachers to encourage their students to write and send letters expressing their concerns to their representatives, then mail copies of the letters (and entry forms) to the "Speak for Yourself" letter-writing contest. Winners are selected from each congressional district. From these district winners, judges select a finalist from each state to receive an all-expense-paid trip to Washington, D.C., to participate in the RespecTeen National Youth Forum each spring. To learn more about the next "Speak for Yourself" contest, call 1-800-888-3820.

The Troubled Journey: A Profile of American Youth

Based on survey responses from about 47,000 students, this in-depth report explores a framework of "assets" (positive influences), "deficits" (negative influences), and at-risk behaviors among 6th-12th grade students. The report suggests specific strategies for communities, schools, parents, and youth-serving organizations. A summary of this report is available free of charge from RespecTeen. Call 1-800-888-3820.

Vision-to-Action Planning™

Vision-to-Action Planning™ is a research-based strategic planning process that has been used by hundreds of human service organizations to facilitate planned change. Search Institute's consulting services division offers training in the process, and it can identify an authorized facilitator who can lead your school or organization through the process. Call Search Institute at 1-800-888-7828 for facilitator and training information.

Change Takes Time

This booklet presents eight key objectives and numerous principles in an effective planned change process. Elements include creating a shared vision, involving opinion-makers, relating innovation to values, diffusing resistance, and others. The booklet also includes brainstorm worksheets for using the process and a bibliography of planned change resources. Available from Search Institute, 1-800-888-7828.

RespecTeen Youth Update

This quarterly newsletter presents research and gives practical ideas of how individuals, schools, organizations, religious institutions, and others concerned about youth can address issues in their community. Each issue emphasizes a different topic and highlights resources available through the RespecTeen program. A free subscription is available from RespecTeen by calling 1-800-888-3820.

Yes You Can!

Subtitled "A Guide for Sexuality Education that Affirms Abstinence Among Young Adolescents," it includes a major section on involving parents and the community in decisions about school-based sexuality education. Its recommendations can be useful for other youth issues as well. Available from Search Institute, 1-800-888-7828.

Other Helpful Resources

The Art of Coalition Building: A Guide for Community Leaders, by Cheri Brown. American Jewish Committee, Institute of Human Relations, 165 E. 56th Street, New York, NY 10022.

Building the Community Collaborative: Mobilizing Citizens for Action, Eva Schindler-Rainman and Ronald Lippitt. University of California Extension, Riverside, CA 92521.

Choosing the Future You Prefer, by Edward Lindaman and Ronald Lippitt. Development Publications, 5605 Lamar Road, Washington, D.C. 20016.

Coalition Building: One Path to Empowered Communities, by Tom Wolff and David Foster. University of Massachusetts Medical Center, 55 Lake Avenue North, Worcester, MA 01605.

Code Blue: Uniting for Healthier Youth, by The National Commission on the Role of the School and Community in Improving Adolescent Health. American Medical Association, 535 Dearborn Street, Chicago, IL 60610.

Collaboration: What Makes It Work, by the Amnerst H. Wilder Foundation. Wilder Research Center, 1295 Bandana Boulevard North, Suite 210, St. Paul, MN 55108.

Community Collaboration: A Manual for Voluntary Sector Organizations. The National Assembly of National Voluntary Health and Social Welfare Organizations, Inc., 291 Broadway, New York, NY 10007.

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